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## Fish stocks 'a huge Ponzi scheme'

By Rebecca Lindell, Postmedia News December 3, 2010 [Be the first to post a comment](#)

The commercial fishing industry has run out of new fishing holes and could soon face lighter nets thanks to its rapid expansion over the past 50 years, according to a new study led by the University of British Columbia.

"Sustainability is not built into our interaction with the sea. . . . We grab what we can and then we deal with the consequences. When there is nothing left to grab we have to go further to get new things," says Daniel Pauly, co-author and principal investigator of the Sea Around Us Project at the UBC Fisheries Centre.

The search has pushed fishermen offshore since the 1900s, creating a no-fish-left-behind style of expansion, Pauly said.

Commercial fishing nets spread throughout the world's oceans at a rate of one million square kilometres every year through the end of the 1970s, according to the study. By the 1980s and 1990s, the industry was eating up fishing areas at triple the rate.

The only untapped fishing frontiers are the unproductive waters of the high seas, the inaccessible waters in the Arctic and Antarctic, and the 0.1 per cent of the world's oceans designated as marine reserves, the study said.

The study is the first to measure the expansion of global fisheries since the 1950s, and was published Thursday in the online journal PLoS ONE.

Catches also ballooned to a peak of 90 million tonnes in the late 1980s from 19 million tonnes in 1950. It dropped to 87 million tonnes in 2005, according to the study.

Pauly says that's a sign there are fewer fish left to catch in the world's oceans.

"It's like a huge Ponzi scheme. They have not harvested the interest of a stock of fish, but the capital. As they are running out of space, the stocks decline."

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